

STATE OF MAINE
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Docket No. 98-659

November 2, 1998

HOULTON WATER COMPANY
Request for Approval of Sample
Unbundled Bill and a Waiver of
Chapter 309 §5(B)(2)

SUPPLEMENTAL ORDER
OF APPROVAL

I. SUMMARY

On October 21, 1998, Houlton Water Company (HWC) filed a request for approval of a proposed sample unbundled bill pursuant to Chapter 309 § 4 and a request for a waiver of Chapter 309 § 5(B)(2) that requires the informational statement be located on the same page as the unbundled rates. In this Order, the bill format is approved and the waiver request is granted.

II. BACKGROUND

On September 9, 1998, Dirigo Electric Cooperative, Inc.¹ (hereinafter "Dirigo") filed a request for approval of proposed sample unbundled bills pursuant to Chapter 309 § 4. Dirigo also requested a waiver of Chapter 309 § 5(B)(2) that requires the informational statement be located on the same page as the unbundled rates for its members that will be using a "self-mailer" style bill. HWC is a member of Dirigo and was included in Dirigo's request.

Dirigo submitted two sample bills for review and approval of the bill's format:

1) a "self-mailer" style bill that was being used by HWC and MEW (sample bill #1); and

2) a recently developed 8½" by 11" bill that each member would use, though only FIEC, KLPD, SIEC, and VBLPD would likely be ready to use by January 1, 1999 (sample bill #2).

In its request, Dirigo stated that all its members were in the process of updating their billing and software systems to accommodate the format of sample bill #2 and would begin using

¹ Dirigo Electric Cooperative members are: Eastern Maine Electric Cooperative "EMEC"; Fox Islands Electric Cooperative "FIEC"; Houlton Water Company "HWC"; Kennebunk Light and Power District "KLPD"; Madison Electric Works "MEW"; Swans Island Electric Cooperative "SIEC"; and Van Buren Light and Power District "VBLPD". EMEC is a member of Dirigo, but has submitted its own proposed sample bill for review and approval and is therefore not included in this Order.

this format on January 1, 1999, or as soon as possible thereafter. HWC and MEW were not as far along as the other Dirigo members in updating their billing systems and would likely use sample bill #1 until such time their billing systems could generate bills in the sample bill #2 format.

Dirigo also requested a waiver of Chapter 309 § 5(B)(2) that requires the informational statement be located on the same page as the unbundled rates for HWC and MWE because the "self-mailer" style bill (sample bill #) did not allow the inclusion of the informational statement on the front of the bill. Dirigo proposed to locate the informational message on the back of every HWC and MEW bill and display a bolded message printed in red ink on the front of the bill directing the customer to the back of the bill for more information on the unbundled charges.

On September 17, 1998, the proposed sample unbundled bills (sample #1 and sample #2) submitted by Dirigo were approved, with the condition that sample bill #2 would be used as soon as practicable after January 1, 1999. The request for a waiver of chapter 309 § 5(B)(2) for sample #1 bills was also granted, with the condition that a bolded message be printed in red ink on the front of all sample #1 bills that stated: "PLEASE SEE REVERSE SIDE FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING THE CHARGES BELOW."

III. DESCRIPTION OF HWC'S REQUEST

On October 21, 1998, HWC submitted a proposed sample unbundled bill (sample bill #3) for approval pursuant to chapter 309 § 4. According to HWC, sample bill #3 will be used in place of the previously approved sample bill #1. HWC has indicated that it will only use sample bill #3 until such time that its billing system can generate bills in the sample bill #2 format.

Pursuant to section 7 of Chapter 309 of the Commission's rules, the Director of the Consumer Assistance Division (CAD) may grant waiver requests, provided that "good cause" exists for granting the waiver and the waiver is consistent with the intent of the rule.

HWC has demonstrated "good cause" for requesting a waiver of Chapter 309 §5(B)(2) for sample bill #3, for the same reasons as stated for sample bill # 1, and granting of HWC's waiver request is consistent with the intent of Chapter 309.

Sample bill #3 is in compliance with the requirements of Chapter 309 §5(B), with the exception of the location of the informational statement.

Accordingly, it is

O R D E R E D

1) That HWC's request for an exemption of Chapter 309 §5(B)(2) for sample bill #3 is granted;

2) That HWC include a bolded message printed in red ink on the front of its sample bill #3 that states: "PLEASE SEE REVERSE SIDE FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING THE CHARGES ABOVE;"

3) That HWC begin using the sample bill #2 format as soon as practicable after January 1, 1999; and

4) That the format for HWC's sample bill #3 is approved pursuant to Chapter 309 § 4 with the above conditions.

Dated at Augusta, Maine, this 2nd day of November, 1998.

BY ORDER OF THE DIRECTOR
OF THE CONSUMER ASSISTANCE DIVISION

Matthew F. Thayer